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## The Big Idea

“Tell me one last thing,” said Harry. “Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?” Dumbledore beamed at him, and his voice sounded loud and strong in Harry’s ears even though the bright mist was descending again, obscuring his figure. “Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean it is not real?”

J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

I begin this by tracing the track of a contact lens across my palm. The lens for my right eye has some sort of grit or gristle or lint or lintel stuck to it, and it has refused to stay put. It has chosen to itch and irritate.

Sometimes this happens. I wonder if contact lenses have agency or sentience; they have annoyed me so often. Some days they glide in like the little ghostly assistants they’re supposed to be, and other days they fight with me, refusing to leave their cool, plastic prisons where they float serenely in sterilization fluid and instead leave that fluid in swirls and trails.

I have bad eyesight mainly due to inferior genetics, but it is exacerbated by too much reading, too much “close work.” My ophthalmologist told me once to look at my classmates because most of them wear glasses for this reason. He was right—many of us sport thick-framed glasses, black or blue or purple or sparkly, caused by our love of books and how close we hold them to our faces. That love has destroyed our sight.

Now we, as literary readers, meditate on the word “sight.” What does it mean to see? In what ways is the author (me, how weird) utilizing all the meanings and connotations of the word to impact it with meaning?

We’re supposed to unpack texts together, like they were suitcases instead of words, but this one’s stuffed full of junk, and we’re stomping on it to keep it closed. Leave it closed; it’s Pandora’s box.

But we have to open it. It’s who we are.

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First, I would like you to realize that this is all fake, that this has been carefully constructed to appear seamless. In reality, I’ve peed and eaten and talked and been rudely interrupted and

agonized and failed and succeeded in the space between two lines.

Writing is a process, until it's post-process; then it's something else.

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Today, during the afternoon nap I took between spurts of trying to finish a paper that will be read once and then forgotten until I revisit it five years from now when I am sad and old, I dreamed I won a beauty contest. The prize was cash: a giant, thick stack of money that felt silky between my fingers. Too late, I discovered that it wasn't money I felt, but my bed sheets. I was disappointed to wake up.

The beauty contest I won earlier today took place on a beach that I keep revisiting in my dreams. It contains a mansion haunted by a young woman in black, a boardwalk, a place where Power Rangers do battle, a parking lot, and a grove of silent banyan trees.

What does that mean? Would Freud have known? Oh, yeah, I forgot, *Interpretation of Dreams* was full of shit.

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It was hard to realize that I wasn't a genius even though I desperately wanted to be one. That was my career goal as a child: to be the smartest and the best, to win a Pulitzer and a Nobel and a million dollars.

It's good to have dreams.

But I'm not the smartest, not by a long shot. In fact, I'm a fucking idiot. Anything remotely smart I've ever said has happened by chance, I'm sure.

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I am interested in the chaos, the dark places, what's between the binaries, the tightrope wire we walk with our little arms outstretched and the abyss below us. What is and is not. I am condemning myself to a life of frustration, I know, but a life that could be meaningful as well. What does it mean to mean?

Every day, we struggle to create meaning, to connect with one another over lines written on paper or screen that sometimes make sense and sometimes make nothing at all. (If a tree falls in a wood and there is no one to hear it, does it make a sound? What a Zen koan.)

We write to find ourselves, as well as other people. We write to find truth, though truth is a slippery little fucker that loves to run away from us just when we think we've caught up. We write because we have to, both for our jobs and for a need within us that can't be filled by booze or drugs or talk.

Lost poster: The Truth. Reward if found.

I am going to fail. I am going to fail. Can I handle this? Can I handle breaking my leg before the end of the race?

What separates us from the truth is that sense of frustration, the sense that an answer is very close but always manages to limp away from us like a wounded animal. We are the primitives who throw spears into the massive beast that constitutes the universe, occasionally striking the poor thing, but more often than not, just managing catching blows that glance off its hide or complete misses that fly away into emptiness.

I think it laughs at our feeble efforts.

We search through the darkness, our hands outstretched, looking for a foothold. Sometimes we find one, but the next is too far away.

As scholars, we're taught to see ourselves in relation to what others have said. We're told to find ourselves in the text. But the text is looking for itself, too: the writer, the creator and destroyer is sitting with his pen or his typewriter or his computer with a glass of alcohol and a cigarette and writing to find truth, and it's not coming. That fucker already came by, raided our fridge, smoked all our weed, fucked our partner, and then left its dirty underwear on our floor.

How I hate the truth.

What does embodiment embody?

I've learned it doesn't have to make sense. The great cosmic joke is that there is no answer.

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We are people in ivory towers who speak to others at the top of ivory towers, shining lights that wander aimlessly through the darkness. A whirl of useless perpetual motion, never ending, unpredictable. A world of noise and static and the occasional bit of color that shines through. A picture of a flower, the sky, a voice.

I want to be the bit that shines through, but I'm afraid that all I'll be is static.

There have been endless manifestoes like mine. Their streams of bullshit have caused the deaths of entirely too many trees, trees that are more miraculous in their very existence than any weak, futile thing I'll ever have to say.

Is this the meaning of life? Is the secret in the struggle? Does life breed in the dark?

God laughs.